



# City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

## Seattle Women's Commission

March 19, 2002

The Honorable Greg Nickels, Mayor

The Honorable Richard McIver, Seattle City Council

The Honorable Members of the Seattle City Council Housing and Human Services Committee  
600 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers:

*SWC supports the Seattle Housing Levy Renewal* and believes it is critical to the livelihood of the many women and children who help to make up Seattle's estimated four thousand homeless people. SWC is particularly concerned about the increasing number of women who often are forced to choose between safe affordable housing and providing basic necessities for their families. *Seattle's 2001 Annual One Night Count* reported of the total 3,965 individuals living in emergency shelters and transitional housing, 25% were adult women with children and 18% single women. Additionally, 37% of the 2,647 households were adult women with children and single women

SCW offers the following comments and recommendations, which we hope will contribute to determining the most appropriate strategies and programs to propose to the voters in the midst of an economic downturn.

- **A balanced and sustainable housing levy with a budget range of \$130 to \$150 million dollars to provide a continuum of care service for the homeless.** We believe this strategy and budget will provide stable and sustainable services by subsidizing housing for the very poor and working poor and by providing viable alternatives for those above 60% of median income.
- **November ballot placement** so as not to compete with the monorail initiative. While transportation is a critical issue, the monorail is one of several transportation alternatives, which may be viewed as a luxury in difficult times. Historically during slow economic times people tend to vote in support of basic necessities. SWC proposes that housing for women and children is a basic need.
- **Rental preservation and production:** A supply of affordable rental housing stock is critical to the continuum of care strategy that the Levy proposes. Many public and private reports cite the lack of livable wages and economic instability as underlying causes that drive the need for low-income housing. According to *Communities Count 2000: Social and Health Indicators Across King County*, about one in five King County residents live in a household without livable wage income. In the past decade there has been a severe loss of affordable housing and a dramatic increase in the cost of housing in the Seattle/King

County area. At the same time, there has been an increase in low-income renters – many of whom are women – seeking housing.

- **Rent assistance:** SWC advocates rental assistance for households up to 60% of median income which would take into account the 2,647 households reported in the *2001 Annual One Night Count*. A levy without rental assistance services would undermine a sustainable strategy for preserving and producing affordable rental properties. This strategy is needed to provide support services for those who are homeless seeking housing or have made the transition and require emergency assistance to prevent eviction. Many of the women currently serviced through rent assistance are victims of domestic violence, in transition from shelters, and/or the working poor. In the area of special population service needs, we recommend attention be given to African Americans who are disproportionately impacted. While African Americans represent only 8.5% of the general population, they are 32% of the homeless population with African American women ranking number one at 33% of the total female homeless population.
- **Community Development Opportunity Fund for distressed communities:** In view of the changes that many neighborhoods have experienced due to development and transition, SWC recommends revisiting the definition for “distressed communities” to determine which communities qualify or to define qualifying measures for these funds regardless of the community profile. This should include attention to measures concerning the appropriation of subsidized housing, decreasing gentrification and building economically viable and diverse communities. If any of these actions are taken, public awareness prior to the ballot may be a necessary step. We suggest changing the title for this program strategy to avoid confusion. The current title is the same as, or similar to, the transit community development mediation fund and may prove confusing to many voters.
- **Operation & Maintenance trust fund:** SWC recommends continued support for the operation and maintenance fund inclusive of, but not distinct from, enhanced property management funds. The operation and maintenance fund is part of the glue necessary to sustain viable, productive and effective low-income housing projects. The enhanced property management funds will provide critical support services for those in low-income housing. According to the *2001 Annual One Night Count*, 840 of the 2002 individuals in shelters and transitional housing with disabilities are women with various mental and long-term illnesses. The shortage of funds available through the McKinney program and cutbacks in other funding sources only serve to support the importance of the O & M funds.

Again, we urge your support to increase opportunities for homeless women for access to decent, safe and affordable housing in Seattle.

Sincerely,

Runette Mitchell, Chair  
Seattle Women’s Commission

Mary Diggs-Hobson, Chair  
SWC Housing for the Homeless Committee